

John: The Miraculous Signs of Jesus Sunday, 3/13/22

Last week we pondered John's epic eighteen-verse prologue to his Gospel, in which John ties together the creation account of Genesis with the astonishing news of the incarnation of Christ. When the Word became flesh, God gave us a unique window into the mind, purpose, and love of the divine. In Jesus is life and the light of all people. John's claims of Christ's divinity are substantiated in his Gospel by miraculous signs, two of which we'll look at this morning.

There are eight miracles described in John, all but two of them are unique to John's Gospel, both of them found in the sixth chapter: Walking on the Sea of Galilee¹ and feeding the 5,000². The first seven of the miracles are in the section of the Gospel commonly called the "Book of Signs," which includes the first 12 chapters of John after the Prologue, while the eighth miracle is in chapter 21, what is often referred to as John's epilogue. The Book of Signs gets its name from John's frequent reference to the miracles as signs of the divinity of Jesus. The other Gospel writers all include unique miracles as well, but not to the extent that John does. Each Gospel author recorded different miracles in their own way to emphasize their understanding of Jesus. John freely acknowledges his selective inclusion of miracles near the end of his Gospel, writing "The disciples saw Jesus do many other miraculous signs in addition to the ones recorded in this book. But these are written so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you will have life by the power of his name."³ We don't have to guess why John selected these miracles. They're meant to be signs that point us to believe in Jesus, the light and life of all people.

The miraculous changing of water into wine has always been a perplexing miracle to me. Healing the blind? I get that. Walking on water? Sign me up! But providing beverage service at a wedding? Isn't that just a little basic, Jesus? After all, anyone with enough coins in their purse could have simply purchased some more wine! For a first miracle, this one seems, well, just a little disappointing, doesn't it? Not quite as spectacular as, say, the

¹ John 6:16-21

² John 6:1-13

³ John 20:30-31. New Living Translation (2nd Edition)

parting of the Red Sea.

Adam Hamilton argues that John's accounts, more so than the other Gospel writers, often have multiple layers of meaning and are less concerned with providing a factual account of the who, what, and where of events and much more concerned with making a spiritual, theological statement.⁴ While there's always some danger in pressing the details or looking for allegorical meaning that a Biblical author never intended, let's try digging a little deeper into this first miracle to see if we can draw out any theological statements consistent with John's view of Jesus elsewhere.

I've said before that it's often helpful to put yourself in the shoes of different people in Gospel accounts, especially people you might not naturally identify with. Who would you pick to identify with in this account? The bride or bride groom, perhaps? Hamilton suggests it's the servant that Jesus spoke to whom Jesus might want us to identify with. It was Mark who first recorded Jesus as saying to his disciples, "Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve."⁵ But the idea of servant ministry is found in John as well, perhaps nowhere more clearly than in John 13, where Jesus washes the feet of the disciples to make this point.

What difference does it make for us to see ourselves as the servants in this miraculous sign? It was the servants to whom Mary said, "Do whatever he tells you."⁶ Their obedience to the instructions of Jesus, filling the jars with water, led to the miraculous sign. Perhaps, Hamilton suggests, "John may have been saying, similarly, that if all of us do as Christ tells us, that our lives can become extraordinary."⁷ That'll preach, for sure, and it does drive home a point that John obviously wants to make. Abiding in Jesus is how we find light and life.

Hamilton also wants us to pay attention to details in John. While sometimes the details are simply there to paint a more vivid picture for us, sometimes they suggest something

⁴ Adam Hamilton. *John: The Gospel of Light and Life*, p. 31. Abingdon, 2015.

⁵ Mark 10:43-45. New Revised Standard Version.

⁶ John 2:5. Ibid.

⁷ Adam Hamilton. *John: The Gospel of Light and Life*, p. 34. Abingdon, 2015.

about Jesus or discipleship. In this case, Hamilton notes that the servants not only filled the jars, but “filled them up to the brim.”⁸ Incidentally, here’s an instance where a more word-for-word translation of the Bible like the New Revised Standard Version can help you. The New Living Translation, which is a thought-for-thought translation, loses this detail completely.

Perhaps John added that detail as a kind of superlative, suggesting a kind of “all-in” obedience to Jesus that leads to an abundant blessing. This may relate to what we read in John 10:10, where Jesus says, “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.”

Although this is a pretty fuzzy exegetical approach, the Rabbis of Jesus’ day were known to be pretty creative themselves in the way they strung stories and Scriptures together. And once again, it will certainly preach! For those of you reading Hamilton’s book, I’d love to hear from you what you think of his approach.

Let’s move on to another miraculous sign, this one found in John 9. I’m starting with verse 1 in the New Revised Standard Version. [{Read John 9:1-9 NRSV}](#)

I’m hope you’ve noticed by now that Jesus tended to cause a kerfuffle just about everywhere he went. Sometimes the crowd got riled up because he wouldn’t perform a miracle on demand, but usually it was when he performed a miracle and someone in the crowd didn’t like what the sign pointed to. The healing of the man born blind is a great example of that, and in the subsequent verses the religious authorities got up in arms, ostensibly because Jesus healed the man on the Sabbath, but really because they refused to believe what the sign pointed to: That is, Jesus is God.

But let’s leave that and focus on the sign of the healing itself. It’s another curious miracle, and in some ways, like the changing of the water into wine, it’s just a little less spectacular than what we might expect from the Son of God. Why bother with the spit and the mud and the washing, when we know that Jesus, the very Word of God, could have simply spoken his eyesight into wholeness? Somehow the whole thing seems unnecessarily complex, a little bit like a magic trick. Is there more to this miracle than meets the eye?

Do you remember how John uses his prologue to tie Jesus, the Word, with God’s

⁸ John 2:7. New Revised Standard Version.

Word in Genesis, and with creation in particular? Hamilton suggests that something similar is happening in this healing.⁹ The one who created the first man out of the dust of the earth has taken on flesh and is now using dust to restore a man's sight. Why? "So that God's works might be revealed in him."¹⁰

But the connection with Genesis seems to go beyond the dust and speak to the basic issue of discipleship. Will we believe in Jesus or not, and believing in him, will we obey him? The man made from dust, Adam, disobeyed God and brought brokenness into a perfect creation. The result was expulsion from the Garden of Eden and a raft of ongoing problems associated with this original sin.

In a way, the man born blind is the mirror image of that account, reversing the broken state of blindness through the act of obedience in his going and washing in the pool of Siloam. How cool is that connection? Did John intend that allusion? Was it something intended by the Holy Spirit who inspired John? I have no idea. But the older I get, the more comfortable I'm becoming with the idea that God's Word is a living thing, and God can and does speak to us in new ways and in new times. As I've said before, God will not be put in a box of our own design and convenience.

God seems to work differently in the world since Jesus ascended to be with the Father and sent the Holy Spirit. We don't see the same kinds of miracles and miracle workers. Or maybe it's just that we don't notice them. John collected up years of eyewitness accounts of miracles and then gave us an inspired theological commentary on them. If we had been living when Jesus walked the earth as a man, it might have been just as easy for us to be unaware of what God was doing in the world.

But we're blessed. We have not only John's Gospel, but three others as well that outline the miraculous signs of Jesus for us. We have Sunday Schools, sermons, Bibles and Bible Studies. There's no longer any excuse to be ignorant of the signs. The question comes down to your response. You've seen the signs. Do you believe what they say? Are you ready to abide in Jesus, the life and light of all people? Are you ready to take a step forward in living a life of obedient love, an embodiment of the light of Jesus for the whole world?

⁹ Adam Hamilton. *John: The Gospel of Light and Life*, p. 41. Abingdon, 2015.

¹⁰ John 9:3. New Revised Standard Version.

Please take some time now to reflect on these questions: What do the miraculous signs tell me about Jesus? What do they ask of me in response?



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